



## BMA to Present First U.S. Museum Exhibition of Work by Acclaimed Senegalese Artist Omar Ba

*Political Animals* to feature both early and recent paintings and works on paper as well as a site-specific mural made especially for the BMA

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BALTIMORE, MD (July 21, 2022)—On November 20, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will open the first U.S. museum exhibition of works by acclaimed Senegalese contemporary artist Omar Ba. Born outside of Dakar and living between Dakar, Brussels, and Geneva, Ba creates expressive figurative paintings that often intertwine African and European cultures and histories to examine the corrupting nature of wealth and power and their impacts on global communities. While Ba's work has been shown extensively abroad, it has not yet been given the study and attention it so richly deserves in the U.S. With *Omar Ba: Political Animals*, the BMA introduces audiences to the incredible conceptual, social, and political relevance of Ba's oeuvre as well as to his distinct formal approach, which combines the fine detail associated with drawing and the scale and grandeur of history paintings. On view through April 2, 2023, *Political Animals* provides visitors with a micro-survey of Ba's practice with approximately 15 large-scale works on canvas and corrugated cardboard, a selection of early works on paper, and inventive modular wall paintings, including a site-specific mural made especially for the BMA's presentation. The exhibition is curated by Leslie Cozzi, BMA Curator, Prints, Drawings & Photographs.

"This exhibition reflects the BMA's vision to share the work of artists who engage with the African diaspora as part of our broader commitment to expanding the narratives of art history and the artists represented in our galleries," said Asma Naeem, the BMA's Interim Co-Director and the Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator. "We are delighted to provide Omar Ba with his first American museum exhibition and look forward to sharing his incredibly compelling and singular work with our visitors. *Political Animals* is an exciting opportunity to bring his voice more actively into our cultural and political dialogues and to explore the distinct ways in which art can illuminate and foster dialogue about critical issues of our time."

Leveraging his lived experiences across two continents, Ba creates works that embrace notions of duality, whether between the personal and political, the masculine and feminine, the historic and contemporary, or the real and imagined. These juxtapositions have provided fertile ground to explore the dynamics of power and violence, social inequities and injustices, immigration and foreign global policy, humanity's relationship to the environment, and the deep history of Africa. His portraits of individuals and groups in varying contexts have captured African dictators, global political leaders, soldiers, aid workers, and everyday people. Ba's oeuvre casts a particularly critical eye on the impacts of western imperialism,

America's global policy interventions, and international foreign aid policies across time. The exhibition's title, *Political Animals*, draws on the premise richly illustrated in Ba's work that all humans are by nature political animals, whose existence is determined and affected by our inclusion or exclusion from large social groups. For the artist, it is also a recognition of the ignoble aspects of human nature.

The intricacy of Ba's subject matter is matched by the complexity of his formal approaches. To make his textural, layered compositions, he first prepares his surfaces—whether canvas, cardboard, or wall—with a black ground, and then builds a kaleidoscope of colors and marks to reveal the contours of his representations of Black figures. In this way, Ba's scintillating paintings are comprised of flecks and beads of discrete color that together form a variegated whole. The energetic quality of his work is further accentuated by the range of materials he employs—watercolor, oil, and acrylic paints; graphite and wax pencils; and ink—as well as the depth of his application techniques, which include the use of both brushes and his hands. In Ba's compositions, the figures sometimes move among recognizable landmarks or geographic and political symbols such as maps and flags. Other, more enigmatic backgrounds feature decorative environments inspired by the Senegalese maritime landscape. Ba's compelling visual vocabulary conveys with strength and urgency the significance of the issues with which he is grappling.

"I am excited by the different ways *Political Animals* will engage visitors. It offers an unabashed feast for the eyes—the opportunity to see some of the most beautiful paintings being produced in the world today—while also inviting viewers to delve more deeply into the human stories behind Omar's meticulous workmanship and layering of texture and color," said exhibition curator Leslie Cozzi. "Omar is a thoughtful observer of global affairs, and his work may well prompt viewers to re-evaluate their own worldview, as it did for me. This carefully curated survey of his work will be as challenging as it is splendid."

*Omar Ba: Political Animals* is organized in a loose chronological order that also allows for thematic groupings around networks of people and power as well as specific geo-political histories. The exhibition will also include an 18- by 28-foot site-specific mural created especially for the presentation at the BMA that the artist is executing on 504 stacked, painted moving boxes—a nod to his constant reference to migration as a determining aspect of human experience and memory. Ba develops these commissions in response to the prevailing news of the day, and will bring his unique viewpoint to bear on current events while also drawing inspiration from a variety of objects in the BMA's collection such as Old Master paintings, 19th-century bronze sculpture, and Tiffany glass.

Ba's first U.S. gallery show will be held at Galerie Templon's inaugural location in New York City from September 7 through October 22, 2022, and a 224-page monograph of the artist's works will be published in December 2022.

## Omar Ba

Omar Ba was born in 1977 in a Serer village near Dakar in the Fatick region of Senegal. After first studying mechanics, he was trained as an artist at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Dakar and the École Supérieur des Beaux-Arts de Genève. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Royal

Museum of Fine Arts (Brussels, Belgium), Wilde Gallery (Basel and Geneva, Switzerland), Galerie Templon (Paris and Brussels), the Contemporary Calgary (Canada), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Canada), The Power Plant (Toronto, Canada), and Hales Gallery (London, UK). Other recent group exhibitions include those at Centre Pompidou (Paris, France), Musée d'Art Contemporain (Marseille, France), Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris, France), Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels, Belgium), and the Royal Academy of Arts (London, UK). His works have been included in several public collections, including those of the Musée des Beaux-Arts Montréal (Canada), Chazen Museum of Art (Madison, WI), Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris, France), Swiss National Collection (Basel, Switzerland), Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris, France), Louvre (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates), Collection du Credit Suisse (Switzerland), Collection Mirabaud (Switzerland) and Ville de Genève (Switzerland). In 2011, Ba received the prestigious Swiss Art Award.

### **Baltimore Museum of Art**

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world's largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation's finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

### **Visitor Information**

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. Timed reservations are required for all visitors to the galleries. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year's Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org).

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